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ABSTRACT

Since 1975, the political climate has increasingly supported the inclusion of American Indian culture and language in Native education and the training of Native teachers. Native teachers enhance the teacher-student relationship for Native students, are role models for Native youth, and are aware of Native learning styles. The ongoing Native Educators Research Project, examining how language and culture are included in the education of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Hawaiian teachers, surveyed 238 students in 27 Native teacher preparation programs and interviewed program administrators. Although most programs articulated a focus on Native language and culture, course contents and requirements often did not reflect that intent. About half the respondents reported that they spoke and understood their Native language and were knowledgeable about their Native culture. About a third could write in their Native language. Nearly all respondents felt that Native language and culture should be included in the schooling of Native children, but only about a quarter felt prepared to teach their Native language, English as a second language, or bilingual education. While more than half felt prepared to teach multicultural education, only about a quarter felt prepared to teach Native culture. Seventy percent of respondents felt prepared to use cooperative/group instructional strategies, but only 40 percent felt prepared in the area of Native learning styles. (TD)

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Building a Native Teaching Force: Important Considerations

Kathryn D. Manuelito

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Native teacher preparation programs provide an approach to improve the learning outcomes of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students, help raise the next generation of leaders, and contribute to the economic base of Native reservations (Billy, 1999). This Digest reviews important considerations in building a Native teaching force by discussing the rationale for developing a Native teaching force, current challenges, and the Native Educators Research Project.

Rationale for Developing a Native Teaching Force

The AI/AN population is approximately 2.5 million (AI/AN only) or 4.1 million (AI/AN in combination with one or more other race), with 37% under the age of 20 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001a; 2001b). In 2000, there were 1.2 million children and youth of school age (5-19 years), about 90% of whom attend public schools (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). Developing a Native teacher force is essential to helping meet the needs of this sizable group of AI/AN children for a number of evidence-based reasons:

- Learning is enhanced when teacher and student share the same language and culture (McCarty & Watahomigie, 1999; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982).

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- Native teachers enhance the teacher-student relationship for Native youth and increase the desire of students to remain in school (Bowker, 1993; Kawagley, 1999; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999).
- Native teachers are important role models for Native youth (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Kawagley, 1999).
- Native teachers provide *connectivity* to Native students' community (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Pavel, Larrimore, & Van Alstine, 2003; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). Connectivity is the foundation of Native teacher preparation programs and is essential for Native people, teachers, professors, and educational institutions (Pavel et al., 2003, p. 210-211).
- Native teachers are likely to be aware of Native learning styles and utilize this information to improve teaching styles (Philips, 1983; Swisher & Tippeconnic III, 1999).

Current Challenges

Presently, insufficient numbers of Native postsecondary students are graduating to meet the high demand for Native teachers. In public schools with high Native American enrollment, 16% of the teachers are Native American (Billy, 1999). In 1997, I conducted an assessment in the Navajo Nation and found that of the 1,132 certified teachers teaching in public, BIA, and grant schools serving Navajo students, only 15% were Navajo.

In the last 30 years, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU), Tribal Colleges in partnerships with nearby universities, and state universities and colleges have provided Native teacher preparation programs. TCUs are the mainstay of Native language and culture, particularly in teacher education programs such as the Diné Teacher Education Program at Diné College (Arizona), Oksale Native Teacher Preparation (Washington), Turtle Mountain Teacher Education Program (North Dakota), and Leech Lake Tribal College Teacher Education (Minnesota) (Pavel et al., 2003). Other teacher education programs that emphasize language and culture are at Sitting Bull College (North Dakota), Sinte Gleska University (South Dakota), and Haskell Indian Nations University (Kansas) (Froelich & Medearis, 1999; Leei, 1999). TCUs cannot, however, bear the major responsibility of developing Native teachers because each institution typically graduates less than 20 teachers a year.

Additional challenges (outlined below) must be met in order to increase the number of Native teachers in schools serving Native students.

The assimilationist curriculum in teacher education programs and in schools. Despite advances, major systemic issues remain in the development of teacher preparation programs. One area of concern is the assimilationist curriculum, the hallmark of American education, which continues to thrive in academia, including in Native teacher education programs. American public education still does not seem to recognize diversity as an asset, which raises the strong possibility

that unique heritages, dialects, and values of particular cultural groups will be excluded with the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, state standards, and high-stakes testing. At least one observer fears that "Native nations and the schools serving their pupils will most likely become as assimilationistic as the pre-1928 BIA boarding and mission schools" (Forbes, 2000, p. 8).

Lack of support in many Native communities. Native people, like other indigenous people around the world, have been greatly impacted by centuries of colonization (Smith, 1999). As a result, Native people are sometimes more supportive of non-Natives guiding their education than they are from guidance from their own people (Cleary & Peacock, 1998). Many are even suspicious of having their languages and cultures included in the school curriculum because they feel it may hinder school learning.

There is often a gap between what Native people view as ideal and what they view as realistically desirable (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; House, 2002). Too often Indian communities proclaim the ideals of language and culture maintenance as an integral aspect of Native education but in practice do not support inclusion. Contradictory attitudes stemming from these perspectives often result in community nonsupport of Native teachers and lack of follow-through in implementing established tribal policies regarding the inclusion of Native language and culture in education. Native teachers, working among a population that still harbors the effects of colonization, need peer and administrative support. This level of support is best

assured by an understanding school board elected by a community committed to the importance of culturally relevant instruction.

Need for clarity in developing Native language and culture programs. Because the Native population includes hundreds of languages and cultures, developing an appropriate curriculum can be problematic, particularly in urban public schools where many tribal groups are represented in one school. Native and non-Native teachers don't know enough about students' Native languages and cultures. For example, instruction in a Native curriculum often can be trivialized. This can happen when the teaching of beading, weaving, or other Native crafts are not connected to the understanding of concepts in math, science, or other academic subject matter.

The Native Educators Research Project

Presently some of these challenges are being examined in the Native Educators Research Project located at the Center for Indian Education, Arizona State University. The three-year study, which began in 2001, is focusing on how language and culture are included in the education of teachers in 27 Native (American Indian, Alaska Native, Hawaiian) teacher preparation programs nationwide. It is hoped that findings from this study will provide the foundation for sounder models and more effective practices in Native education.

The study includes five key research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of Native preservice teachers toward the inclusion of language and culture in schooling?

2. How do teacher preparation programs impact these attitudes?
3. What are the standard components of programs that evidence their specific interest in meeting the needs of Native students?
4. What factors exist in the teaching environments to support or thwart teachers' efforts to incorporate language and culture or situate learning within the local context?
5. Do teachers perceive that students' learning, academic achievement, and social development are enhanced by the inclusion of language and culture in their classrooms?

Data have been collected related to the first three questions via the use of a survey (238 of 500 were returned, for a response rate of 46%). Other information about the teacher preparation programs was received through program progress reports, program proposals, and interviews with program administrators. The fourth and fifth questions will be investigated in the second and third years of the study.

Important background information to consider in reading survey results (reported below) include the following observations:

- Of the 27 programs reviewed, 10 are situated in colleges of education within state universities; 2 are in private religious affiliated institutions, and 15 are based at tribal colleges.
- The mission statements for each program stress the intent to prepare teachers to be responsive to the needs of Native students. Many specifically articulate a focus on Native language and culture. However, the course content and requirements often

do not reflect this intent.

- Nearly all of the programs used a combination of field-based and classroom learning. Mentoring by instructors, community members, or classroom teachers was a strong component in many of the programs, and distance learning was heavily used in nine of the programs.

Preliminary results from the surveys are briefly discussed here in four categories:

Demographic profile. More than 80% of the respondents were female and nearly half were over the age of 30. Nearly half (48%) indicated they had prior experiences as an Instructional Aide.

Language and cultural aptitude or capability. Nearly half (45%) of respondents reported that they spoke their Native or tribal language, while 59% said they understood their Native or tribal language. About a third could write in their Native language; 42% could read it. More than half (56%) reported that they are "somewhat/very" to "very" knowledgeable about their own Native/tribal cultures and traditions.

Attitudes toward the inclusion of Native language and culture in schooling. Nearly all respondents (95%) felt Native/tribal *language* should be included in the schooling of Native children. Nearly all respondents (97%) felt Native/tribal *culture* also should be included.

Professional preparation. Few respondents (26%) felt prepared to teach their Native/tribal language, English as a second language

(25%), or bilingual education (24%). While half of the respondents felt prepared to teach multicultural education, only about a quarter (26%) felt prepared to teach Native/tribal culture. Respondents (61%) were more confident about their preparation to deal with issues of parent and community involvement.

Although 70% felt prepared to use cooperative/group instructional strategies, only 40% felt "somewhat" or "well" prepared in the area of Native learning styles.

Results of this study as well as previous research findings will help inform efforts to develop a stronger and more knowledgeable Native teaching force. However, from a Native perspective, no event or process is completely finished; it is always in a state of change and becoming. So, too, in the case of Native education, and particularly Native teacher preparation programs.

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